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ABSTRACT

This performance guide is designed for teachers to use with students before and after a performance of "The Pearl" by John Steinbeck, adapted by Warren Frost and dramatized for the Kennedy Center by Nick Olcott. It is in the form of a Director's Notebook--a scrapbook/journal of clippings, memos, lists, illustrations, notes, and other items--to show students how a director finds and develops ideas to make a playwright's script come to life on stage. The "Cuesheet" contains 10 sheets for use in class, addressing: (1) Locale and Origin of "The Pearl" (looking at the original folktale heard in Baja, California); (2) The Story and Characters of the Play; (3) Important Dialogue (with important lines from the play for discussion); (4) Social Background and Resources (looking at social and power relationships in the story, and listing resources for further exploration); (5) Design Problems To Solve (looking at set, sound and music, and costume design issues that contribute to the play's effectiveness); (6) Pearl Lore (with information about how pearls are formed, their value, where they are cultured, and beliefs about pearls); (7) Why a Theatre Audience Is Unique (discussing the important role of the audience in live theatre); and (8) About John Steinbeck. (SR)

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John Steinbeck: "The Pearl," Adapted by Warren Frost and Dramatized for the Kennedy Center by Nick Olcott. Cue Sheet for Students.

by John C. Carr

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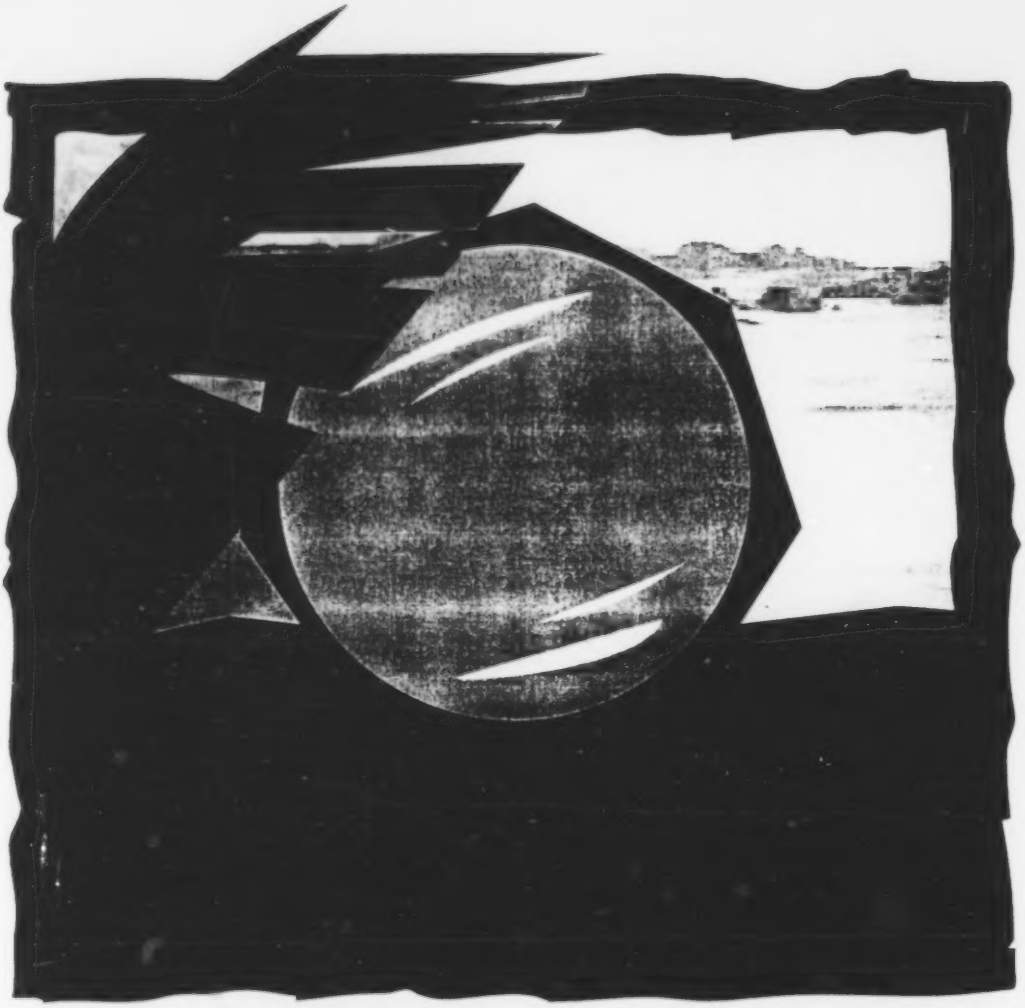
CUE SHEET for Students

JOHN STEINBECK

THE PEARL

ADAPTED BY WARREN FROST AND
DRAMATIZED FOR THE KENNEDY CENTER BY NICK OLCOTT



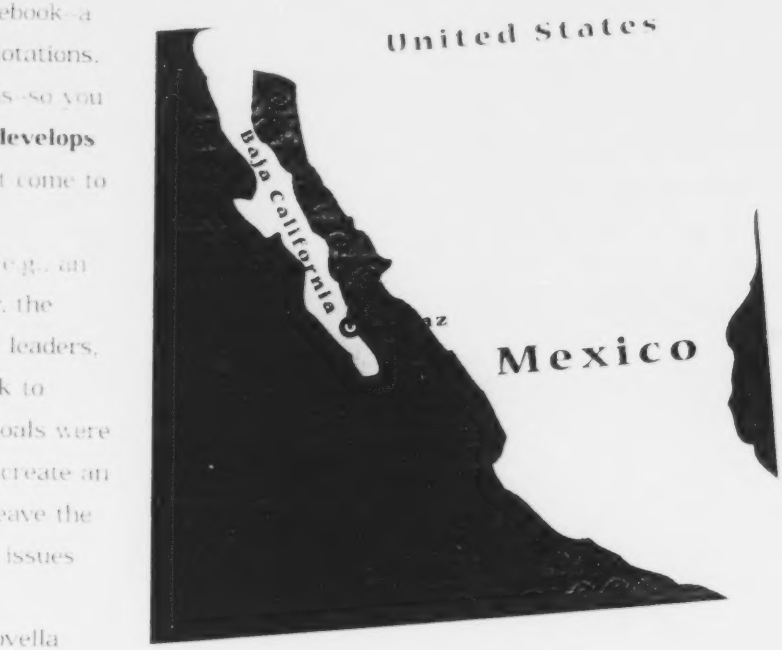
From The Director

I am sharing my Director's Notebook--a **scrapbook/journal** of clippings, quotations, illustrations, notes, and other items--so you may see **how a director finds and develops ideas** to make a playwright's script come to life on stage.

A director is like other leaders, e.g., an athletic coach, a musical conductor, the president of a business. Like other leaders, **directors guide people** as they work to achieve goals. For *The Pearl*, our goals were to tell a good story theatrically, to create an overall effect of suspense, and to leave the audience thinking about important issues that affect all of us.

After I read John Steinbeck's novella (short novel) *The Pearl* and did some research, I began to work **collaboratively** with many other playmakers--the playwright as well as the set, sound, lighting, and costume designers, and actors. This Notebook shows you my thoughts and interactions with many of the playmakers for *The Pearl*.

I have placed **a shell** near some items you may want to talk about with your friends, classmates, or family.



The Notebook includes:

Locale and Origin of *The Pearl*, page 3
The Story and Characters of the Play, pages 4-5
Important Dialogue, page 6
Social Background and Resources, page 7
Design Problems to Solve, page 8-9
Pearl Facts and Lore, page 10
Why a Theater Audience is Unique, page 11
About John Steinbeck, page 12

Write to me about the Director's Notebook and how it influenced your understanding of the production of The Pearl. I look forward to hearing from you. Cuesheet/The Pearl, Education Department, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C. 20566

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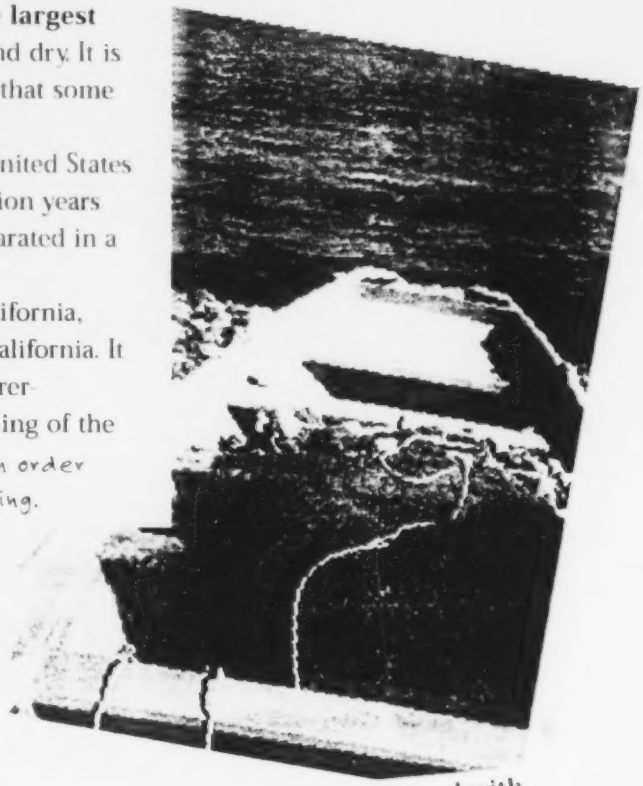
Locale and Origin of The Pearl

Baja California is a peninsula that is a part of Mexico. In the northern part of the peninsula is the state of Baja Cali Norte. To the south is Baja California Sur, where the **largest city is La Paz.** The land of Baja California is vast and dry. It is mostly desert, with some mountains. It is in La Paz that some parts of *The Pearl* take place.

Baja California extends from the border of the United States 760 miles south into the Pacific Ocean. Until 5 million years ago it was part of the Mexican mainland, but it separated in a huge earthquake.

The Sea of Cortés, also known as the Gulf of California, stands between the mainland of Mexico and Baja California. It is named for Hernan Cortés, the 16th-century explorer-conqueror of Mexico who overcame Montezuma, King of the Aztecs.

Let's look at the map on page 2 in order to get an idea of the play's setting.



Notes for the first rehearsal with cast:

Basic parts of *The Pearl* are similar to those of a folk story John Steinbeck heard while traveling by ship along the coast of Baja California. Steinbeck reported that he was told that the story had "happened at La Paz in recent years."

The captain of the ship remembered that "in that area at the time, there were lots of myths about boys finding pearls of great value and throwing them back into the sea."*

* Wish Steinbeck in the Sea of Cortes, by Sparky Enea as told to Audrey Lynch. Los Osos, CA: Sand River Press, 1991

The Folk Story

An Indian boy accidentally found a huge pearl. He realized that he would not have to work again. He could "be drunk as long as he wished, marry any one of a number of girls...." He could give money to the priest to say masses to ask forgiveness for his sins, and to aid the souls of his relatives, too. The pearl buyer to whom he wanted to sell the gem offered only a small amount. The boy refused to sell the pearl and buried it underneath a rock. He was attacked and beaten two nights in a row by people searching for it. On the third night he was ambushed and tortured, but he did not reveal its hiding place. After deep thought he removed the pearl from its hiding place and threw it back into the sea.

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The Story of the Play

Kino, a young Mexican Indian pearl diver, lives with Juana and their infant son, Coyotito, in a village at the edge of the sea. When a **scorpion** bites Coyotito, they go to the city of La Paz to seek a doctor's help. The doctor refuses to treat the child because Kino can only pay him with **seed pearls.** Juana cares for Coyotito the best she can.

In a frantic effort to get money for the doctor, Kino and Juana go out in their canoe to dive for pearls. As he collects oysters, Kino sees one that is larger than all the others. When he opens it, he finds a pearl so large that it comes to be known as the **Pearl of the World.**

Kino believes the pearl is a source of good, saying that when he sells it his family's life will "be better... **our son's life will be better** yet."

Soon everyone in the village knows about Kino's luck. Word spreads to the town. The priest arrives, suggesting that Kino make a contribution to the church. The **greedy doctor,** saying that he is concerned about Coyotito, visits and pretends to cure the baby.

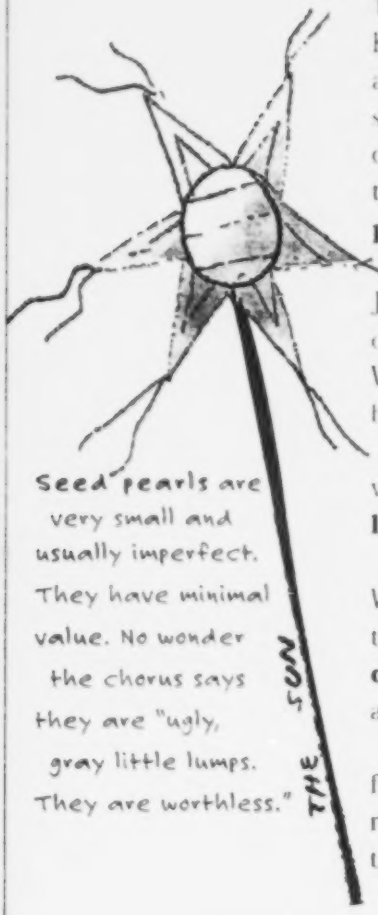
At night, Kino hides the pearl under his mat on the dirt floor. Later, he is **attacked by a robber,** but the pearl remains safe. Juana urges Kino to throw the pearl back into the sea, but he does not.

By now, everyone envies Kino and Juana and turns against them. Kino tries to sell the pearl to **pearl buyers,** who try to cheat him. At night, **intruders try to steal** the pearl and Kino kills one of them.

To escape, Kino and Juana decide they must leave the village, but they find their canoe smashed. Then their hut is destroyed by fire. In an effort to **escape their enemies,** they go into the nearby mountains, but quickly realize they are being followed by armed trackers.

Juana hides with Coyotito in a cave, while Kino attacks the resting trackers. He kills them but in the process **a rifle fires, killing Coyotito.**

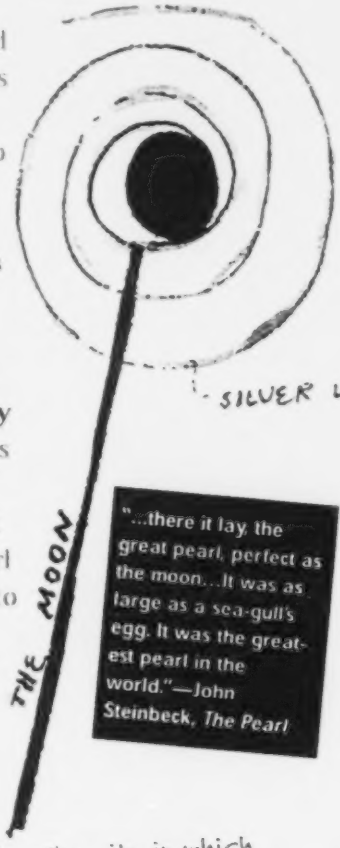
Kino can no longer deny the truth: The pearl is a source of evil, not of good. He and Juana return to the village and **throw the Pearl of the World back into the sea.**



Seed pearls are very small and usually imperfect. They have minimal value. No wonder the chorus says they are "ugly, gray little lumps. They are worthless."

The setting and characters of *The Pearl* give the feeling that Steinbeck knew them well. In the late 1930s he and a friend went on a long exploration of sea life in the Gulf of California, also known as the Sea of Cortés. On that trip he saw many places and met many people who influenced the descriptions and ideas in *The Pearl.*

Scorpions are arachnids, a class of animals that includes spiders, ticks, and mites. They range in size from 1/2 to 8 inches, and carry poison in their tails.



"...there it lay, the great pearl, perfect as the moon... It was as large as a sea-gull's egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world."—John Steinbeck, *The Pearl*

The city in which part of the story occurs is La Paz, which is Spanish for "peace." Note the irony of the name in relation to the violence of spirit and body which occur once Kino finds the Pearl of the World.

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Notes for the second rehearsal with cast:

- In the folk story which inspired John Steinbeck to write *The Pearl*, the only character is the young pearl diver, whose name is not given.
- Steinbeck added more characters in his novella.

The play retains all the major characters from Steinbeck's novella:

Kino - a young Indian pearl diver

Juana - Kino's wife

Coyotito--Kino and Juana's infant son

Juan Tomas--Kino's brother

Apolonia--Juan Tomas' wife

The Doctor--A greedy and heartless physician

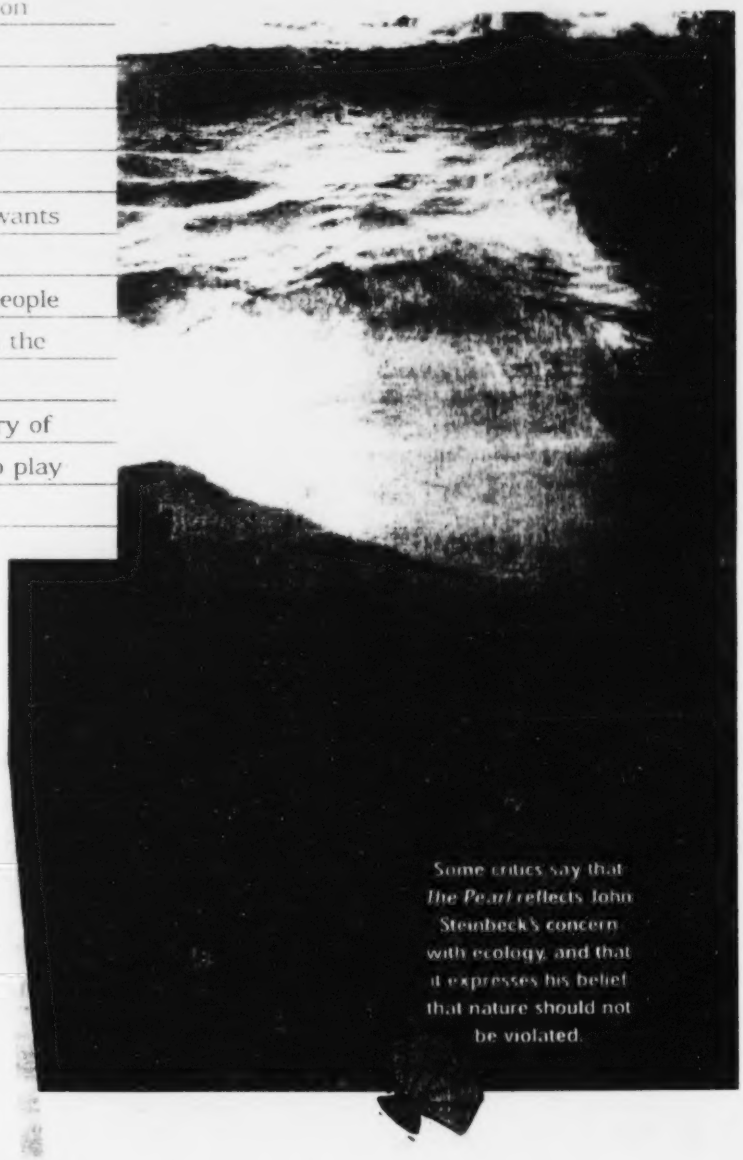
The Priest--a local clergyman who wants money to repair the church

The Pearl Buyers--three nameless people who represent the society that exploits the Indians

The Chorus--actors who tell the story of the Pearl to the audience, and who also play many characters in the story.

From discussion with the playwright:
The challenge of adapting a work of fiction to the stage is how to turn characters' inward thoughts and story narration into significant events and actions that can happen on stage. Additional scenes and characters are sometimes needed to accomplish this.

Let's discuss how these people interact, how they feel about one another, and what each one of them wants in the play.



Some critics say that *The Pearl* reflects John Steinbeck's concern with ecology, and that it expresses his belief that nature should not be violated.

From The Director

To: The Cast
Look at this dictionary definition.

Parable: a simple story that illustrates a moral or lesson.

At our next rehearsal, let's talk about this quote from Steinbeck's introduction to *The Pearl*:

"If this story is a parable, perhaps everyone takes his own meaning from it and reads his own life into it."

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From The Director

Important Dialogue

To: The Cast

Here are six lines from the script I would like you to think about for our second rehearsal. Let's talk about themes in the play and how these lines help to convey those themes. We must be sure that the audience understands their importance.

CHORUS

As with all the tales in people's hearts, there are only good and bad things...

In the beginning of the story, Kino's life is perfect and whole. He has love, family, and community. But because of the choices he makes, he destroys each of these. We must make sure the audience realizes that Kino is not wrong to want more for himself and his family. Instead, they must understand that the mistake Kino makes is choosing violence as a means to get what he wants. By using violence he becomes the target of violence and ends up losing everything he desired.

APOLONIA

He's not one of us, Juana.

JUAN TOMAS

The gods—God—doesn't give you things just because you want them.

KINO

My son will make numbers, and these things will make us free because he will know. He will know, and through him we will know.

Notes from discussion with playwright:

Two scenes were added to help the audience understand the story by seeing the events from the community's perspective.

* A party to celebrate Kino's good fortune, at which a belligerent neighbor, reveals his resentment at Kino's good fortune.

* Two fisherman mending fishing nets to show the community's reaction to Kino's interest in getting the help of the doctor.

JUAN TOMAS

Your friends! Yes, they'll protect you. But only as long as they are not in danger or discomfort from it.

JUANA

The pearl is evil! Destroy it before it destroys us.

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Social Background and Resources

From The Director

To: The Cast

Consider the way Kino says "I am a man."

Bear in mind that this story depicts traditional life in a remote area of Mexico 50 to 60 years ago. That means that...

- the relationship of men and women is unequal: men make decisions and women accept them. Women sometimes expressed their opinions and cautioned men about their actions, but, ultimately, they did what men decided. Juana urges Kino to throw the pearl back into the sea, but she accepts his decision to keep it.
- there is tension that is usually unspoken between the Indian population (Kino, Juan, Juan Tomas, Apolonia) and the Hispanic population (the Doctor, the Priest, the Pearl Buyers). The descendants of Spanish settlers had social power, controlled the economy, and frequently exploited the Indians.

In many ways, Mexican Indians were treated the same way American Indians were treated in this country.

To: Assistant Director

Please locate these resources that all of us can use.

Benson, Jackson J. True Adventures of John Steinbeck, Writer. New York: Viking Press, 1984.

Fonterose, Joseph. John Steinbeck: An Introduction and Interpretation. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.

Hayashi, Tetsumaro, ed. A New Study Guide to Steinbeck's Major Works, with Critical Explications. Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, 1993.

Ito, Tom. The Importance of John Steinbeck. San Diego: Lucent Books, 1994.

Moore, Harry Thornton. The Novels of John Steinbeck: A First Critical Study. Chicago: Normandie House, 1939.

Steinbeck, Elaine and Robert Wallsten (editors). Steinbeck: A Life in Letters. New York: Penguin, 1976.

Watt, F.W. John Steinbeck. New York: Grove Press, 1962.

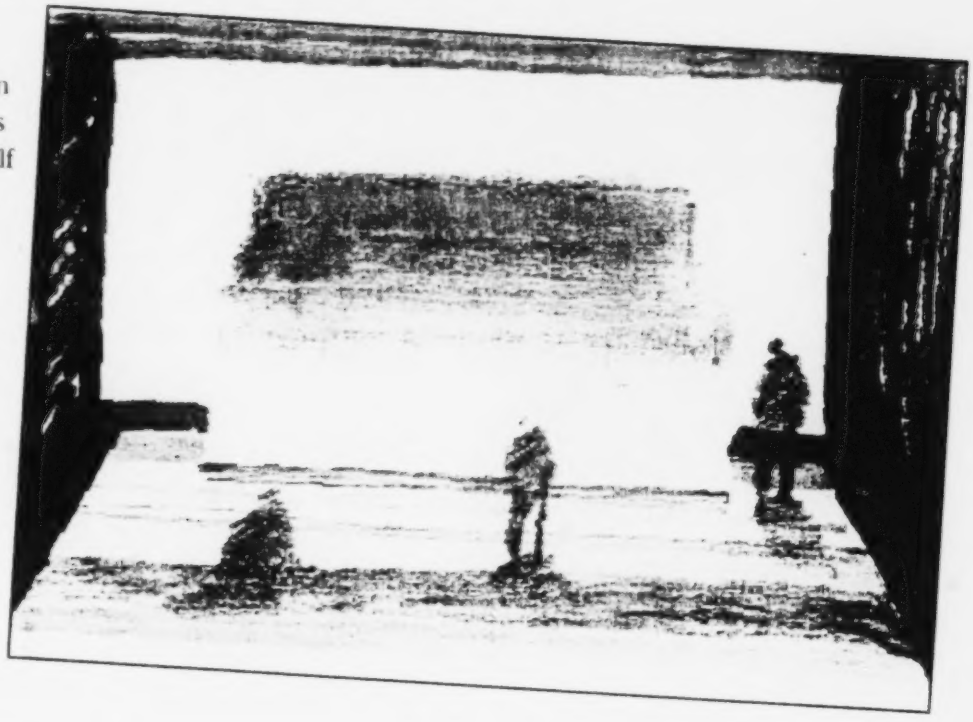
It might be a good idea for all of us to see the video of the 1948 film of The Pearl. It's available from either Multimedia, Inc. 1517 West Fullerton Avenue, Chicago, IL 60614 or Mastervision, Inc., 959 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10028.

Design Problems to Solve

Ideas for Set Design

1. The set should be minimal, inviting audience members to use their imaginations. While most things are only suggested, the set must help make clear that the story occurs in a remote and poor part of Mexico. The time of the play is probably the 1930s or '40s, but that is not as important as helping the audience realize that the story is timeless. The characters and events could be in any place at any time.

2. A wall stretches across the back of the stage. On the wall might be waves which represent the Gulf of California, where the pearl is found. There might be two doors in the center. An opening in the wall on the right side and higher up could serve as the window of a house and, later, as the cave.



3. The floor should be painted in an abstract design with a variety of colors that suggest the earth and water.

Ideas for Sound & Music Design

1. Before the play begins, let's help the audience focus on the play by making a soundscape—a kind of landscape using sounds. This pre-show soundscape might include the sound of waves, village noises, barnyard animals.
2. Let's try to reflect the actors' daily routine and dialogue in the sounds of the chorus.
3. How might we use percussion to imply a sense of place and a mood?
4. How can we use sound/music at the end of the play to imply that life in the village is as it was in the beginning?

Tentative Prop List

- Sleeping mat
- Table
- Grate for fire
- Knife
- Rifle
- Scorpion
- Boat
- Sun
- Moon
- Blankets wrapped together to suggest an infant
- The pearl—large enough for the audience to realize its unusual size

(In Steinbeck's novel he says the pearl is the size of a sea gull's egg, which is about 3 inches long and 2 inches around, and weighs about 2 1/2 pounds.)

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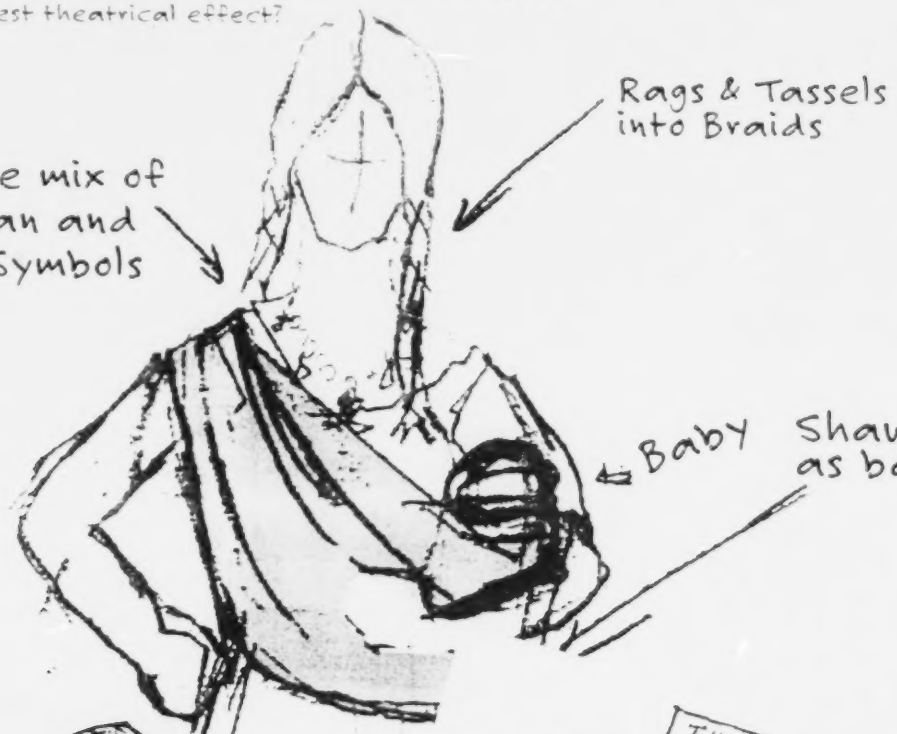
Costumes, Puppets, Masks

There should be a constrast between the costumes worn by the poor Indian natives and the costumes worn by the Doctor, Priest, and the Pearl Buyers. How can we show this? Which colors and fabrics will create the greatest theatrical effect?



Are there other places where puppets would be effective? For example, the scorpion and in the pearl diving scene?

Let's consider using puppets for the Pearl Buyers who try to cheat Kino. Should they be realistic or stylized? What size would create a strong effect? What colors? Can one person manipulate the puppets?

What is a simple and effective way to convey the self-indulgent way the doctor lives? Mask? Puppet? Something else?

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Pearl Facts

If they are large and perfectly shaped, pearls are among the most valuable gems. Unlike most other gems, pearls are not mined from the earth but are taken from shellfish called mollusks, especially oysters and mussels. Pearls are among the **organic gems** made by animal or vegetable processes; others include ivory, coral, and amber.

Pearls are the result of a natural defense against a tiny foreign substance, such as a **grain of sand,** that enters a mollusk and causes irritation to its membranes. Cells which produce **nacre,** the lustrous layer inside the shell, begin to form around the foreign substance. Layers of nacre, also called mother of pearl, build up around the substance and eventually **form a pearl.**

The **shape and lustre** of a pearl are important in determining its value. Round pearls are the most sought after, but there are also button-shaped, drop-shaped, and irregular-shaped pearls called baroque.

"The Pearl of the World" was the original title of The Pearl when it was published in The Women's Home Companion magazine in 1945.

Luminescence: giving off light

Kino says he thinks the Pearl of the World is worth 50,000 pesos. In 1930, one peso was worth 47 cents in American currency. If Kino is correct, the pearl was worth $23,500. Today, the pearl would be worth $210,500.

Pearl-oyster beds are found in tropical waters. The chief ones are near Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. Pearls are also found off some islands of the South Pacific, along the coast of Australia. In North America, they are found in some parts of the Mississippi River, in the Caribbean, and in the **Gulf of California,** where *The Pearl* takes place.

Some pearls are called oriental pearls, not because they are found in the Orient (or Far East) but because jewelers refer to the "orient of a pearl" to mean a pearl's **luminescence.**

Most pearls are silver-gray, but they can be pink, orange, black (actually dark gray), gold, cream, or purple. **Cultured pearls** are pearls which grow when pearl farmers insert beads of mother of pearl inside oysters and allow them to develop for seven years.

Imitation pearls are made of glass.

Let's list some ways pearls have been used in literature and visual art.

Pearl Lore

Since ancient times, people have regarded pearls as beautiful, mysterious, and even magical.

Some people believed that pearls were raindrops that had been swallowed by oysters, or that they were the tears of the gods. In China it was believed that dragons spit pearls.

Pearls have long been used as charms. Dissolved pearls have been used in love potions. Powdered pearls mixed with lemon juice were used in an effort to cure drunkenness, epilepsy, and hysteria, and as a cosmetic. Dissolved pearls have also been used as antidotes for poison.

Some people believe that pearls lose their lustre when their owners are ill or die.

Sometimes pearls are used to symbolize the human soul. They also stand for hidden knowledge, patience, purity, peace, and tears of either sorrow or joy.

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Notes for Audience Program

Why a Theater Audience is Unique

Television, rock concerts, and plays are forms of entertainment that ask for different kinds of responses from audiences.

Television almost begs us to talk back to it, and most of us do. When others are watching with us, we also talk to them about what's on the screen—and sometimes other things as well. We also leave and re-enter the room. We watch and listen and talk and move around all at the same time.

Rock concerts insist that we join in the musical celebration by singing, clapping, shouting, and sometimes dancing. We also talk a lot about what we're experiencing. We watch, listen, sing, talk, and dance all at the same time.

Plays, on the other hand, ask for something different. They request emotional and intellectual commitment that can come only from close and quiet attention. While we may laugh and applaud at appropriate times, we watch and listen. There are good reasons why:

- Plays take longer to unfold than 30 minute television programs; that means that to appreciate them fully, it is necessary to pay close attention to what the actors say and do.
- Members of the audience who are listening and watching closely are easily distracted by the sounds and movements of other audience members.
- Actors in a play are in the same room as the audience and are therefore affected by audience behavior. Film and television performances are fixed on film and, therefore, are not affected by audience activity. Actors must move precisely, must time their lines and reactions carefully, and must make subtle adjustments on the basis of the moment. Unexpected activity can destroy their concentration.

Theater is a collaborative art. It requires the combined efforts of many people in many kinds of work. When the playwright, director, designers, actors, and audience work together, the result is a play to which each—and all—have contributed.

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About John Steinbeck

Born in Salinas, California, in 1902, John Steinbeck grew up fascinated by books and people. In high school he worked as a hired hand on ranches in the Salinas Valley, observing both the people and countryside that would play important roles in many of his books.

He moved to New York City when he was 23 to become a full-time writer, but he was not successful. After he returned to California, his first three novels were published, but critics did not like them and they did not sell well. His writing career changed in 1935 with his next novel, *Tortilla Flat*. In 1939, his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* won the Pulitzer Prize. From then until his death in 1968 he published many works of fiction and nonfiction, and received many awards and honors.

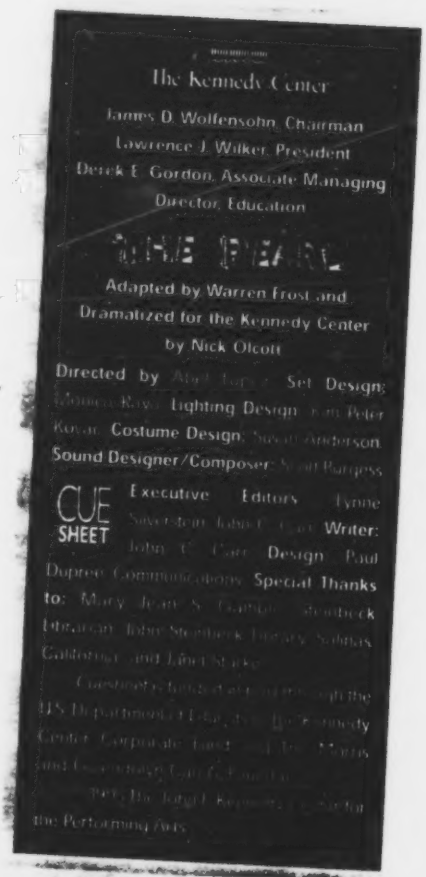
PHOTO BY PHILIPPE HALSMAN, © 1979 U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

Steinbeck liked to write about subjects based on fact. Many of his stories take place in his native California and deal with subjects and people he knew and observed. He was an enthusiastic traveler who also wrote about places and people he visited.

Steinbeck was deeply concerned about social injustice, as shown particularly in *The Pearl* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. The citation for his Nobel Prize for Literature noted, "...his realistic as well as imaginative writings, distinguished by a sympathetic heart and a keen social perception."

THE NOBEL PRIZES were established to honor people "regardless of nationality" who have made valuable contributions to the "good of humanity." Prize categories include physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine, economics, and literature. The prize for literature is given for an author's life's work rather than for one book. The literature must be of "an idealistic nature."

Some Americans who have received the prize, besides John Steinbeck, are Sinclair Lewis, Eugene O'Neill, Pearl Buck, William Faulkner, Ernest Hemingway, and Toni Morrison.



The Kennedy Center

James D. Wolfensohn, Chairman
Lawrence J. Wilker, President
Derek E. Gordon, Associate Managing Director, Education

THE PEARL

Adapted by Warren Frost and Dramatized for the Kennedy Center by Nick Olcott

Directed by [illegible] Set Design: [illegible] Lighting Design: [illegible] Costume Design: [illegible] Sound Designer/Composer: [illegible]

CUE SHEET Executive Editors: [illegible] Writer: [illegible] Design: Paul Dupree Communications Special Thanks to: [illegible]

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